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LETTERS STATINTL

OUT OF LIMBO CPYRIGHT

To the Editors:

I should like to return from the limbo to which Mary McCarthy consigned me, and reply to her absurd but malicious article, *Report From Vietnam III: Intellectuals* [NYR, May 18]. I have long admired Miss McCarthy as an eminent fictionist. In this article, her latest contribution to that genre, she displays the talents for which she is famous. Her treatment of social scientists in general, and of Michigan State University and myself in particular, simply indicate that she was moved more by the flow of her own rhetoric than by the need to be factual.

It was especially flattering to learn that I had "invented" Ngo Dinh Diem, but that is an honor I must disavow. Diem was known and respected by the Vietnamese long before I or any other American had met him. In fact, Ho Chi Minh had offered him the Vice Presidency in his government four times before I appeared on the scene. Bao Dai, furthermore, had tried to induce Diem to head his government several times, but Diem had refused because neither Bao Dai nor his French sponsors would record a non-Communist Vietnam the independence which was Diem's *sine qua non* for accepting office. Beyond this, Miss McCarthy seems bothered by the thought that I had introduced the word "semantics" into official discourse about Vietnam. Unfortunately, though she writes well, Miss McCarthy gives no indication that she reads well. Her flip reference to an article of mine that appeared in *The New Leader* in 1959 shows that she either did not read it at all, or she glanced through it to find a passage with which she might lambaste me. This is not the place to argue with Mary McCarthy over whether Western political terms and categories are applicable to emerging Asian nations. Suffice it that many social scientists working in such areas have concluded that they are not applicable without considerable modification. That, very simply, was the thrust of the article in question. (I should add for the record that, as most writers are aware, *The New Leader*, like most political magazines, titles its articles. The oft-quoted unfortunate phrase, "Vietnam's Democratic One-Man Rule," was *The New Leader's*, never mine.)

As for Miss McCarthy's remarks about Michigan State University, the CIA, and myself, this is a classic example of how one man's charges, however effectively refuted they may be, are picked up and repeated by another person, and another, and yet another, elaborated upon and embellished, until, in this ridiculous example, she writes that "the CIA virtually took over Michigan State University to train a Vietnamese police force and to form Vietnamese adepts in Political Science and Public Administration." In fact, there was never at any time any overt or covert connection between MSU and the CIA. There was no contract nor even

an informal relationship. Except for five training officers among the 23 members of the police training division of the MSU project in Vietnam, who had been hired away from US Government agencies to train Vietnamese police (civil police, not secret police) in counter-subversive organization and techniques, no member of the MSU project—including myself—was ever employed by or made a consultant to the CIA, to the best of my knowledge. Furthermore, there was at no time any passage of funds, direct or indirect, from the CIA to MSU, nor was there at any time any "spying" activity permitted, or even contemplated.

Miss McCarthy's article, in short, is a rehash of disproved assertions. It is part of a larger syndrome—the equation of gossip with history, involving a progression from unproved assertions to unrelated conclusions, and unworthy of Miss McCarthy or *The New York Review of Books*.

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Mary McCarthy replies:

I didn't mean that Professor Fishel invented Diem out of whole cloth. He had to have something to work with. It is true that the Bao Dai had offered Diem the premiership twice and that Ho had offered him a post in his government, in 1946, when Ho was looking for nationalist backing. According to Bernard Fall (*The Two Viet-Nams*), the post was the Ministry of the Interior. Fall also cites an interesting fact: that Diem's name never figured in a sort of *Who's Who in Indochina*, a red book published every year till 1943 by the French Governor General, listing leaders and leader-material; three of Diem's brothers, including Nhu, were listed. This may prove how stupid the French were or how little known Diem was. In any case, Diem as "the man of providence" was an American invention; he was put into power on American insistence and kept there on American insistence. All authorities I am aware of are agreed on this. It is generally agreed too that his meeting with Professor Fishel in Tokyo in 1950 (when he had just got the brush-off from General MacArthur) was what put him on the map. His chief palace advisers, aside from members of his family, when he came into power, were Professor Fishel and Colonel (now General) Lansdale of the CIA. See Donald Lancaster, for instance (*The Emancipation of French Indo-China*), on Diem's lack of local support, which Lancaster accounts for partly by his long absence in the United States during the war against the French. Robert Shaplen contributes a biographical note that may explain the instant attraction between them. When he was in Tokyo, Diem was a student of communism. As early as 1925, as a French provincial official, he became alerted

sion and "immersed himself" in communist studies. The French took no interest in Diem's conversion, but with the Americans it was love at first sight.

The content of Professor Fishel's *New Leader* article is as I described it. Here are a few more snatches. "Is Ngo Dinh Diem a 'dictator' or a 'democrat'? . . . Ngo Dinh Diem has all the authority and all the power one needs to operate a dictatorship, but . . . he isn't operating one! Here is a leader who speaks the language of democracy, who holds the powers of a dictator, and who governs a Republic in accordance with the terms of a Constitution." "It may seem paradoxical to some that out of strong governmental power may come individual freedom. But considering the context in which Vietnam exists, can one think of a more dependable method of assuring it?" I don't see that the author of these lines has anything to complain of in *The New Leader's* title except maybe that it stated clearly what the author was getting at. Incidentally, when I used to write occasionally for *The New Leader*, they did not title my articles.

Professor Fishel is right when he objects to my statement "the CIA virtually took over Michigan State University, . . ." etc. That is a big exaggeration. In fact, the CIA (a US government agency for international cooperation) made an open contract with MSU involving only fifty-four professors, 200 Vietnamese assistants, and 25 million dollars. I think this was a CIA-inspired project but I cannot prove it. What has been attested, though, by other members of the program, is the presence of a CIA nucleus—the five men alluded to by Professor Fishel, some of whom, according to one MSU professor, were given faculty rank. These men, listed on the University chart as "Police Administration Specialists," were training an internal security police force, modeled on the FBI. I don't know what Professor Fishel means by using "civil" police as an antonym of secret police; this must be more semantics. Undercover agents of an internal security police force are engaged in intelligence work; they are political policemen. If there were such a thing as a civil police force as opposed to a criminal police force and a political police, they would have to be traffic cops. Is that what Professor Fishel is trying to say?

Finally, I was too hasty in assuming that Professor Fishel was in Limbo. He is still active and operating from quite another address—234 Fifth Avenue—as I discovered from a money-raising appeal that came through the mail the other day from the American Friends of Vietnam, Incorporated, with Wesley R. Fishel on their letterhead as first vice-chairman. "Dear Friend," it said, "The nature of the Communist threat to South Vietnam has never been clearer than it is today. . . . We call upon you and other Americans to educate the essential facts concerning the situation in South Vietnam." Underneath, in small italics: "Contributions are de-